The IUP Writing Center
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APOSTROPHE USAGE

Explanation:
In general, apostrophes are used for the following purposes: to show possession; to indicate that an indefinite pronoun is possessive; and to pluralize numbers mentioned as numbers, letters mentioned as letters, words mentioned as words, and abbreviations.

Remember to follow these rules that show when apostrophes are not used: do not use an apostrophe with nouns that are not possessive.

Do not use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns such as its, whose, his, hers, ours, yours, and theirs.

Examples:

Appropriate Uses of the Apostrophe
Possessive nouns usually indicate ownership, as in Tim's hat or the lawyer's desk. Frequently, however, ownership is only loosely implied: the tree's roots; a day's work. If you are not sure whether a noun is possessive, try rephrasing it: the roots of a tree; the work of a day.

To create a plural form of a noun:

1. If the noun does not end in s, add 's. Roy managed to climb out on the driver's side.

2. If the noun is singular and ends in s, add’s. Lois's sister spent last year in India.

> * Exception: If pronunciation would be awkward with the added s, omit it. Euripides' plays are among my favorites.

3. If the noun is plural and ends in s, add only an apostrophe. Both actresses' jewels were stolen.

4. To show joint possession, use an apostrophe with the last noun only; to show individual possession, make all nouns possessive. Have you seen Joyce and Greg's new camper? John's and Marie's expectations of marriage couldn't be more different.

> Note: In the first sentence above, Joyce and Greg jointly possess one camper. In the second sentence, John and Marie individually have different expectations.

5. If a noun is hyphenated or compound, use an apostrophe with the last element. Her father-in-law's sculpture won first place.

How apostrophes indicate that an indefinite pronoun is possessive:
Indefinite pronouns are those that refer to no specific person or thing: **everyone, someone, no one, or something**.
Someone's raincoat has been left behind.
This diet will improve almost anyone's health.

How apostrophes mark contractions:
In contractions the apostrophe takes the place of a missing letter.
If that's not love, what would you call it?
Doesn't Frank plan to go on the tour?
"That's" stands for that is. "Doesn't" stands for does not.

How apostrophes pluralize numbers mentioned as numbers, letters mentioned as letters, words mentioned as words, and abbreviations:
e.g., Peggy nearly skated perfect figure 8's.
The bleachers in our section were marked with large red J's.
We've heard enough maybe's.
You must ask to see their I.D.'s.

Inappropriate Uses of the Apostrophe:

Avoid common misuse of the apostrophe.

1. Do not use an apostrophe with nouns that are not possessive.

Incorrect: Some outpatient's are given special parking permits.
Correct: Some outpatients are given special parking permits.

2. Do not use an apostrophe in the possessive pronouns its, whose, his, hers, ours, yours, and theirs.

Incorrect: Each area has it's own conference room.
Correct: Each area has its own conference room.
* "It's" means it is. The possessive pronoun "its" contains no apostrophe, despite the fact that it is possessive.

Incorrect: This course was taught by a professional florist who's technique was oriental.
Correct: This course was taught by a professional florist whose technique was oriental.
* "Who's" means who is. The possessive pronoun is whose.

Always proofread, revise, and, when possible, sit down with a tutor and talk about your writing.